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# SCHOOL ENTRY AGE

Fact Sheet  
**36**

September 2010

## *At what age are children required to start school?*

Effective July 1, 2002, the age of eligibility for enrolling prekindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade students changed. The State Board of Education adopted September 1 as the cut-off date for the age of entrance to school and phased in the new date at the rate of one month per year in accordance with the plan outlined in COMAR 13A.08.02 Age for School Attendance.

**Prekindergarten:** Beginning with the 2005-06 school year and each school year thereafter, a child admitted to the prekindergarten program in the public schools shall be 4 years old or older on September 1 of the school year in which the child applies for entrance.

**Kindergarten:** Beginning with the 2006-07 school year and each school year thereafter, a child admitted to the kindergarten program in the public schools shall be 5 years old or older on September 1 of the school year in which the child applies for entrance.

**First Grade:** Beginning with the 2007-08 school year and each school year thereafter, children admitted to first grade shall be at least 6 years old on or before September 1 of the school year in which they apply for entrance.

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## *Is enrollment in kindergarten mandatory?*

Yes. Every age-eligible child must be enrolled in kindergarten in either a public school or a nonpublic school approved by MSDE, enrolled in a licensed child care or family child care program, or enrolled in a Head Start five-year-old program before enrolling in first grade.

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## *Can entrance to kindergarten be delayed?*

Yes. State Board of Education regulations allow parents or legal guardians to submit a one-year level of maturity waiver for a kindergarten-age child if they believe that a delay in kindergarten attendance is in the best interest of the child. The child, however, must attend kindergarten the next year. For more information, see Maryland State Department of Education Fact Sheet 49, Level of Maturity Waivers.

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***May children begin  
prekindergarten,  
kindergarten or  
first grade early?***

According to COMAR 13A.08.02 Age for School Attendance, local school systems must adopt a regulation allowing for the early entrance of a student to prekindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade:

√ *Prekindergarten:* The local board of education shall adopt a policy permitting a 3-year-old child, upon request by the parent or guardian, to be admitted to prekindergarten if the local superintendent of schools or the superintendent's designee determines that the child is eligible under COMAR 13A.06.02 and has demonstrated educational needs warranting early admission.

√ *Kindergarten:* The local board of education shall adopt a policy permitting a 4-year-old child, upon request by the parent or guardian, to be admitted to kindergarten if the local superintendent of schools or the superintendent's designee determines that the child has demonstrated capabilities warranting early admission.

√ *First Grade:* The local board of education shall adopt a policy permitting a 5-year-old child, upon request by the parent or guardian, to be admitted to the first grade if the local superintendent of schools or the superintendent's designee determines that the child has demonstrated capabilities warranting early admission.

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***What happens if  
children are  
overwhelmed  
by kindergarten?***

Since kindergarten is the first school experience for most children, there will always be children, regardless of their age, who have difficulty adjusting to the school routine. In this case, close communication between the child's family and the child's teacher is crucial for supporting the developmental growth of the child. Under certain circumstances, the teacher may provide or arrange for specific intervention services to address the child's needs immediately and effectively.

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***How can I  
learn more?***

To learn more about your child's entrance into school, contact the Early Learning Branch at MSDE at 410-767-7798; write to the Maryland State Department of Education, Early Learning Branch, 200 W. Baltimore Street, Baltimore, MD 21201; or contact the Division of Early Childhood Development Help Desk at 877-605-1539.